11-5-84

MERCED

DOWNTOWN SIGN GUIDES

REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF MERCED

MERCED THEATER - MAIN STREET

MERCED CITY COUNCIL

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Tom Archer, Mayor Pro Tempore

Phyllis Matson

Norman Herman

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Timothy S. Fisher, A.I.A., Design Consultant

COVER

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CONTENTS

PURPOSE

The purpose of design review is to promote the orderly and harmonious development of project areas within the City of Merced. This is intended to provide a stability of land values, an increase in investments, and promote the general welfare.

The design review process attempts to prevent the depreciation of land values due to the construction of unsightly, or undesirable projects. Poor or inappropriate exterior design of improvements to real property adversely affect the properties in its vicinity.

The City of Merced conducts its design review through its Design Review Commission as authorized by Chapter 20.86 of the Merced Municipal Code.

Signing is the single-most frequently reviewed element in the downtown core context. This guide is provided by the Redevelopment Agency to inform the public and assist the Design Review Commission.

HISTORY of DESIGN REVIEW

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October, 1956   Formation of "Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal."

August 5, 1957   Activation of "Revelopment Agency of Merced" for the "Fifteenth Street Project Area", Project Area #1, City Council Resolution #2144.

December 11, 1969   Formation of "Merced Downtown Improvement District."

August 5, 1974   Re-activation of Redevelopment Agency for Project Area #2.

May 3, 1976   Formation of Architectural Review Board within Planning Commission, Redevelopment Agency Resolution #231.

November 19, 1979   Replacement of Architectural Review Board through formation of Design Review Board comprised of community design professionals, Redevelopment Agency Resolution #278.

March 1, 1982   City Council creates the Design Review Commission for the purpose of conducting comprehensive site plan and architectural reviews within project areas, City Council Ordinance #1431.

JURISDICTION
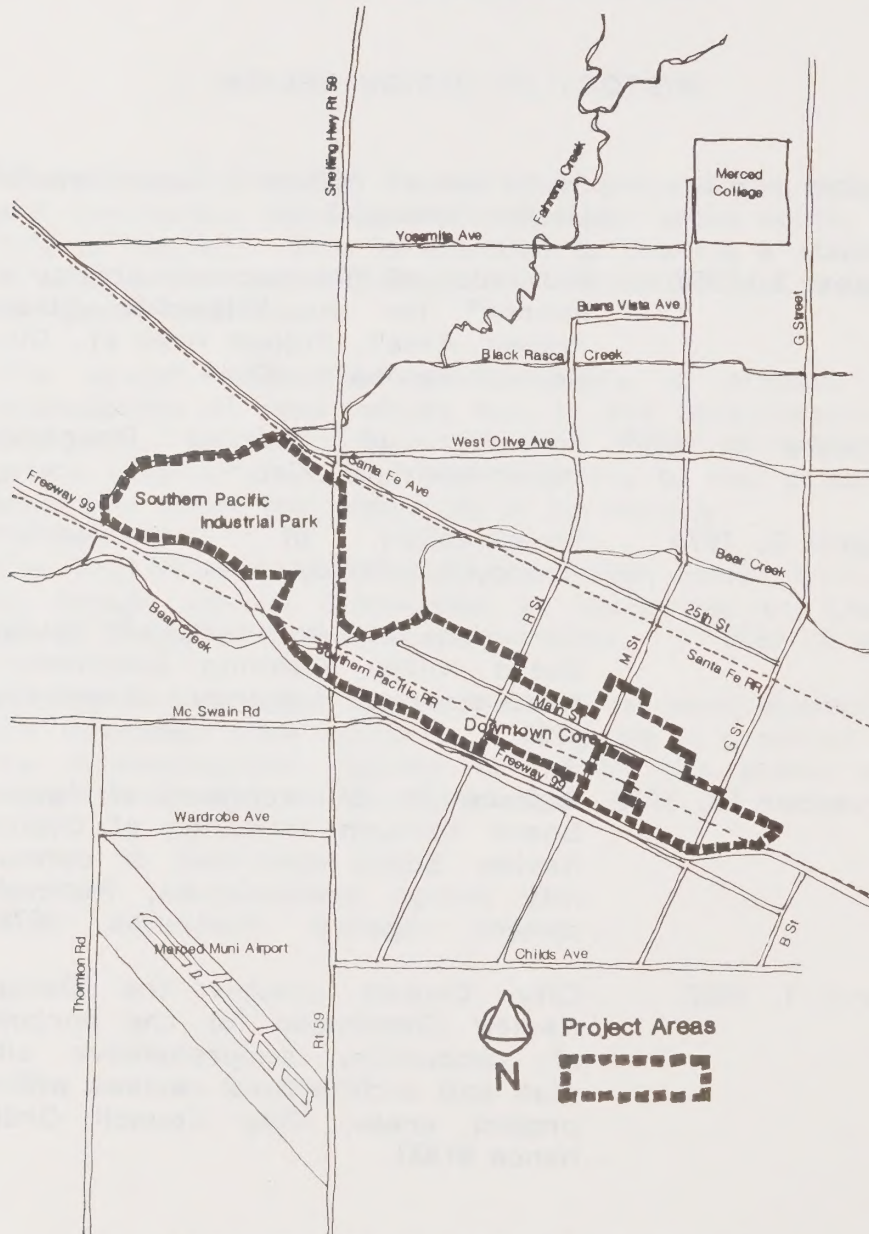
All properties within these Project Area boundaries are subject to Design Review

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

The requirement for a review is placed on ALL EXTE-RIOR MODIFICATIONS within the project area which require a building permit. Applications for review may be acquired from the Design Consultant at the offices of the Redevelopment Agency.

The Design Consultant will discuss the proposed project with the applicant to assist in preparation of the application. The Design Consultant may assist the applicant with:

-Interpretation of guidelines

-Possible problems

-Possible solutions

-Review schedule

-Small sign/paint approvals

For the purposes of securing the advice of the Design Review Commission prior to making application for formal action, a "CONCEPTUAL REVIEW" is available.

A Conceptual Review is not required but, in many cases, it is useful in familiarizing an applicant with the objectives of the Design Review Commission.

Filing for a "FINAL REVIEW" may be made without benefit of a Conceptual Review. Completed applications for a Final Review must be submitted at least 3 days prior to the actual meeting. This provides time for the Design Consultant to develop background information and submit the proposal to the Building, Engineering, Fire and

Planning Departments. These backgrounds and depart-
mental comments are useful to the Design Review Com-
mission in making their determinations.

The Design Review Commission may make one of three
determinations:

Approval

Indicates that a project may be submitted to
the Building Department for a permit.

Approval with Conditions

Indicates that a few changes or additions
should be included in plans PRIOR to submittal
to the Building Department.

Denial

Indicates that the Design Review Commission
does not approve of the plans. At this point,
the applicant may:

a. Revise plans and re-file for another
Final Review; or

b. Appeal the Design Review Commis-
sion's decision to the City Council
within 5 days of the Final Review.

NOTE: The Building Department will not accept appli-
cations for permits in the project areas without the
signature of the Design Consultant on them.

Applicant (or Representative)

Design Consultant
Discuss project with applicant.
Discuss design guidelines.
Advises applicant of problems.
Advises applicant of solutions.
Schedules "Conceptual Review"
  or "Final Review."
Approves small signs and paint
  colors.

OR

File for Final Review

(DRB/DRC) CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Hears applicant's proposal.
Advises applicant of problems.
Advises applicant on solutions.
Makes recommendations to
  applicant for inclusion in
  "Final Review" application.

DRB/DRC meetings are scheduled for
the second and fourth Wednesday
following the first City Council
meeting of the month.

Applications for "Final Review"
must be received by the Friday
prior to DRB/DRC meetings.

Applications will be submitted to
the Building, Engineering, Fire
and Planning Depts. by the Design
Consultant for preliminary review.

**File for
Final Review**

DRB/DRC FINAL REVIEW

Possible Actions

Appeal or Refile for Final Review ◁ ☐ Denial ✱

✱ Approval ☐

✱ Approval with Conditions ☐

Design Consultant
Signature on documents.
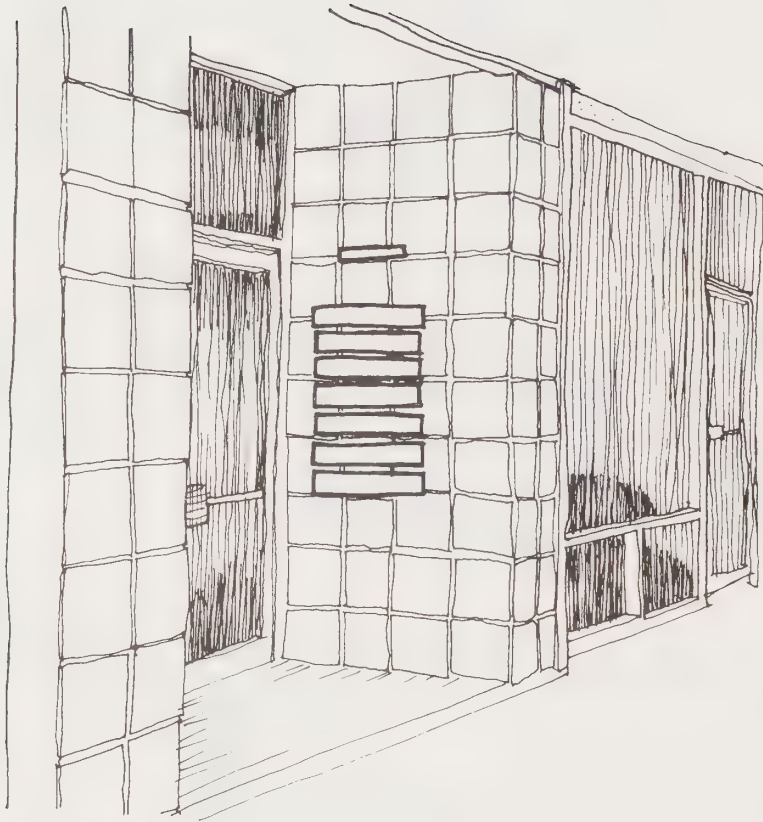
Acquire Permit at Building Dept

-6-

SIGN TYPES

To aid in discussing signing, the following are used to illustrate some common sign types.

MONUMENT SIGNS

A monument sign is a freestanding sign which stands on grade.

     a.   6' maximum height.

     b.   Individual letters 12" maximum height.

BUILDING IDENTIFICATION PLAQUES

The plaque is mounted on the building to denote the building's identity, tenants or historical information.

    a.   8" x 48" maximum size.

    b.   Permanent and maintenance-free construction.

    c.   3" maximum letter size.

PEDESTRIAN SIGNS

A pedestrian sign is attached to the bottom of a permanent canopy, perpendicular to the building frontage.

    a.   12" maximum sign height.

    b.   7'6" clearance from sign bottom to sidewalk.

   c.   No extension past canopy.

    d.   7' maximum width.

AWNING SIGNS

An awning sign is painted, stitched, sewn or stained onto the exterior of an awning (18" maximum letter height).

WALL SIGNS

A wall sign is mounted flush and is affixed securely to a building wall. It projects no more than 12" from the face of a building wall, and does not extend horizontally or vertically beyond the building.
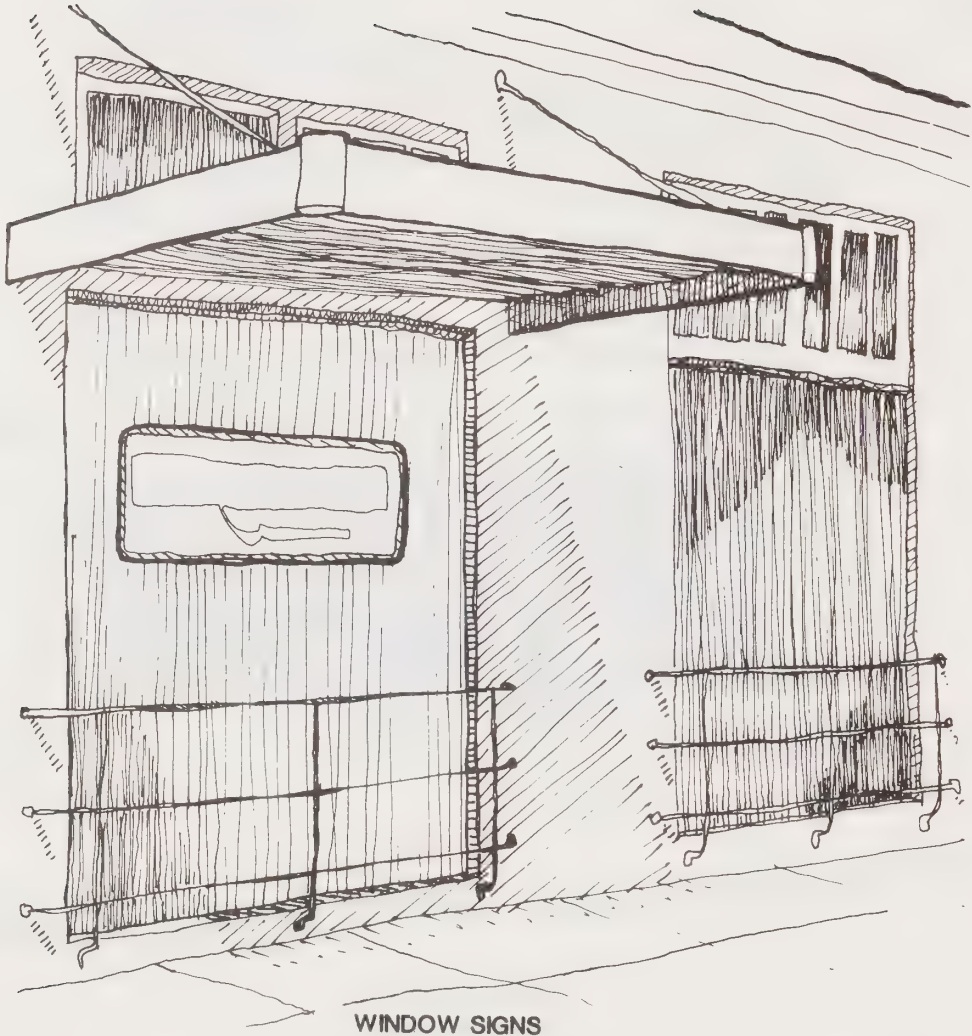
WINDOW SIGNS

A window sign is painted, posted or displayed on trans-
parent surface, including windows and doors.

    a.   Not to cover more than 25% of window area.

    b.   Permitted on ground floors only.

FREEWAY SIGNS

A freeway sign is permitted only in the Freeway Zone
(see map). These signs are to be oriented to freeway
traffic for those establishments providing freeway ser-
vices only.
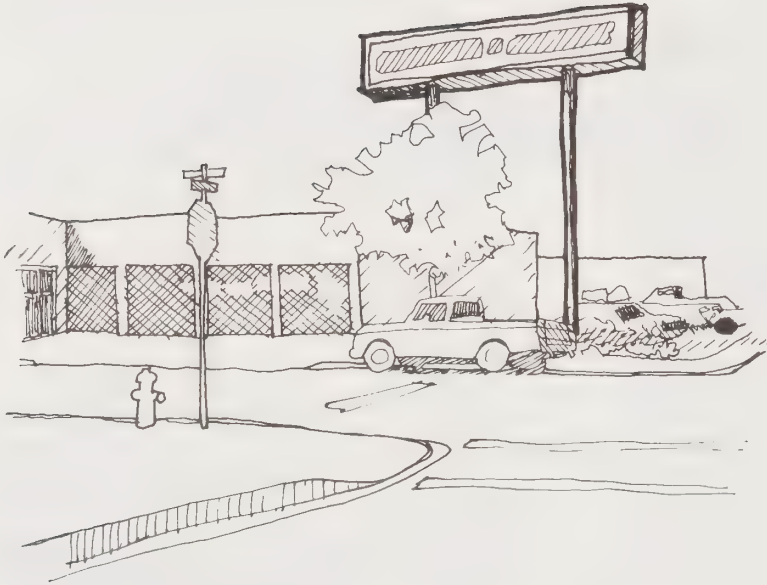
FREESTANDING SIGNS

A freestanding sign is not a part of nor attached to any building. The sign is mounted on a pole(s) above grade. This type of sign is not permitted except as noted:

a.   Automobile parking/sales lots or parking lots greater than 50' deep.

b.   Not to protrude over public right-of-way.

c.   Not to be greater than 20' in height.

PROJECTING SIGNS

A projecting sign is attached to a building or structure and extends perpendicular to the building frontage.
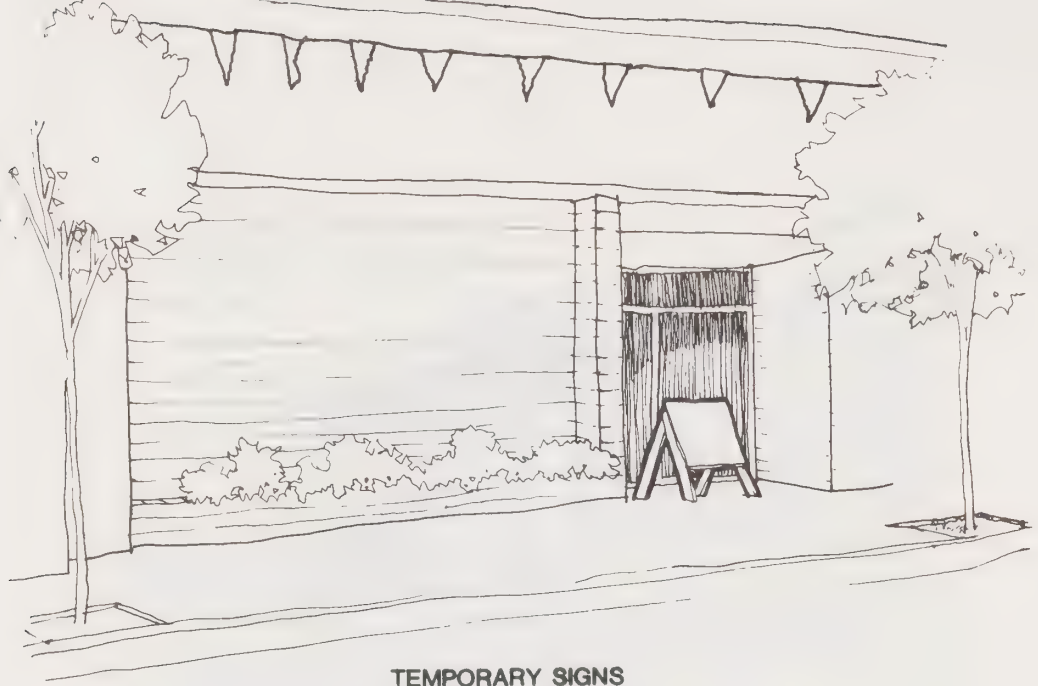
TEMPORARY SIGNS

A temporary sign is intended to be used for a maximum of 30 days.

a. Real estate signs shall not exceed 5' in height or 6 square feet in area.

b. Construction signs shall be located at least 15' within property lines and shall not exceed 8' in height and 32 square feet in area.

c. New or changed business signs may be installed in compliance with the guidelines.

d. Sandwich signs may be used for businesses and locations to indicate a temporary or special occasion.

e. Flags, pennants, banners or similar devices are not permitted except during recognized federal, state or city holidays or for functions as approved by the DRB/DRC or their designee.

f. Signs, posters, bulletin boards or any material advertising elections, community programs, campaigns and/or promotional materials shall be permitted within store windows but are not permitted to be mounted on any exterior surface.

g. Temporary encroachment permits are required if temporary signs are to be placed in a public right-of-way.
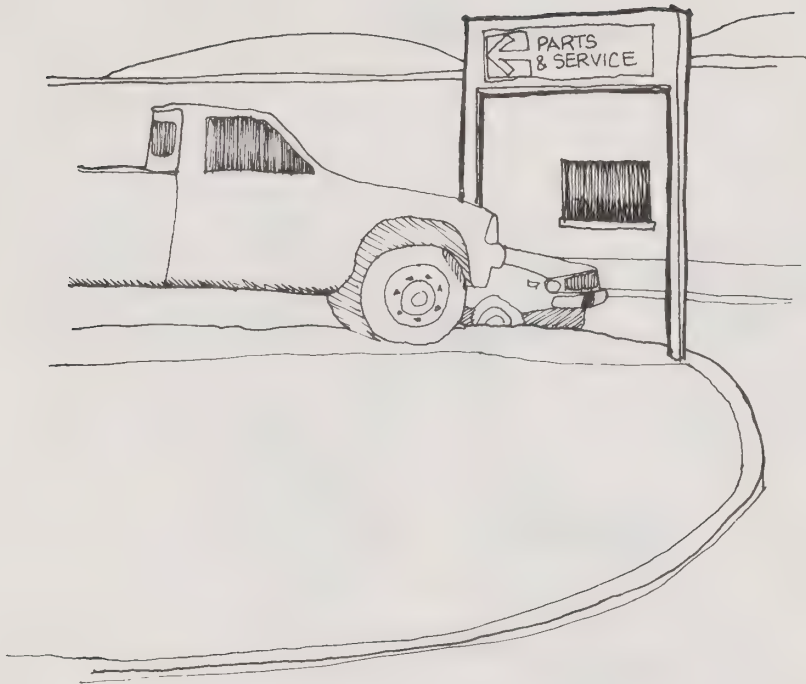
DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

A directional sign gives specific traffic information or suite location; it is not an advertising sign.

    a.   8' maximum height.

    b.   48" maximum length.

    c.   Not included in total signage area.

    d.   No logos are permitted. The use of logos cause the sign to be included in signage area.
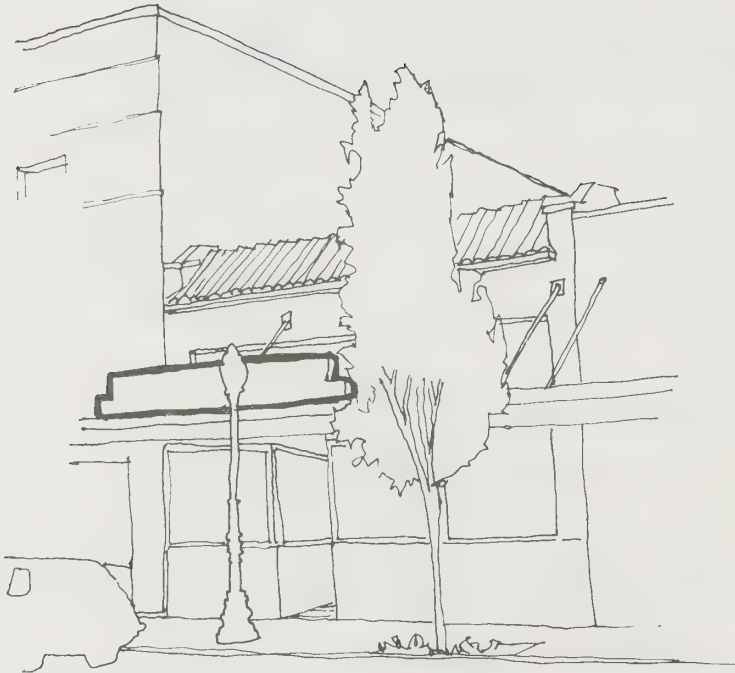
MARQUEE SIGNS

A marquee sign is attached to the top or face of a permanent canopy, parallel to the building frontage.

   a.   20" maximum sign height.

   b.   18" maximum letter height.

SIGN GUIDES

These are guides -- not "rules." They are offered to applicants as a means of communicating a synopsis of past actions and they are offered to the Commissioners as a tool to promote consistency in decisions.

General Guidelines

A. One (1) square foot of signage is allowed for each foot of building frontage for buildings not exceeding two stories.

B. One and one-half (1-1/2) square feet of signage is allowed for each foot of building frontage for buildings with two to four stories. Two (2) square feet of signage is allowed for each foot of building frontage for buildings over four stories.

C. Total sign area is computed by sign cabinet size or by blocking individual letters when cabinets or frame are not used.

D. All sides of multi-sided signs contribute to total sign area.

E. Existing non-conforming signs which are destroyed or damaged in excess of fifty percent (50%) of current costs must be replaced.

F. Sign maintenance is encouraged. Cleaning, painting and repairing to identical condition can be done without review.

G. Signs which threaten public safety (as verified by the Building Department) may be removed or repaired immediately without review.

H. Symbolic signing and public art is encouraged.

I. Businesses without street frontage may use signs at the street not to exceed the area allowed at the borrowed frontage.

J.   Blank walls adjacent to open lots may be used for painted wall signs if it does not exceed 75 percent of the frontage sign area.   Total sign area allowed cannot be exceeded.

K.   Signs should be PLANNED ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES which avoid dominating the site or building to which they are attached.

Signing Patterns
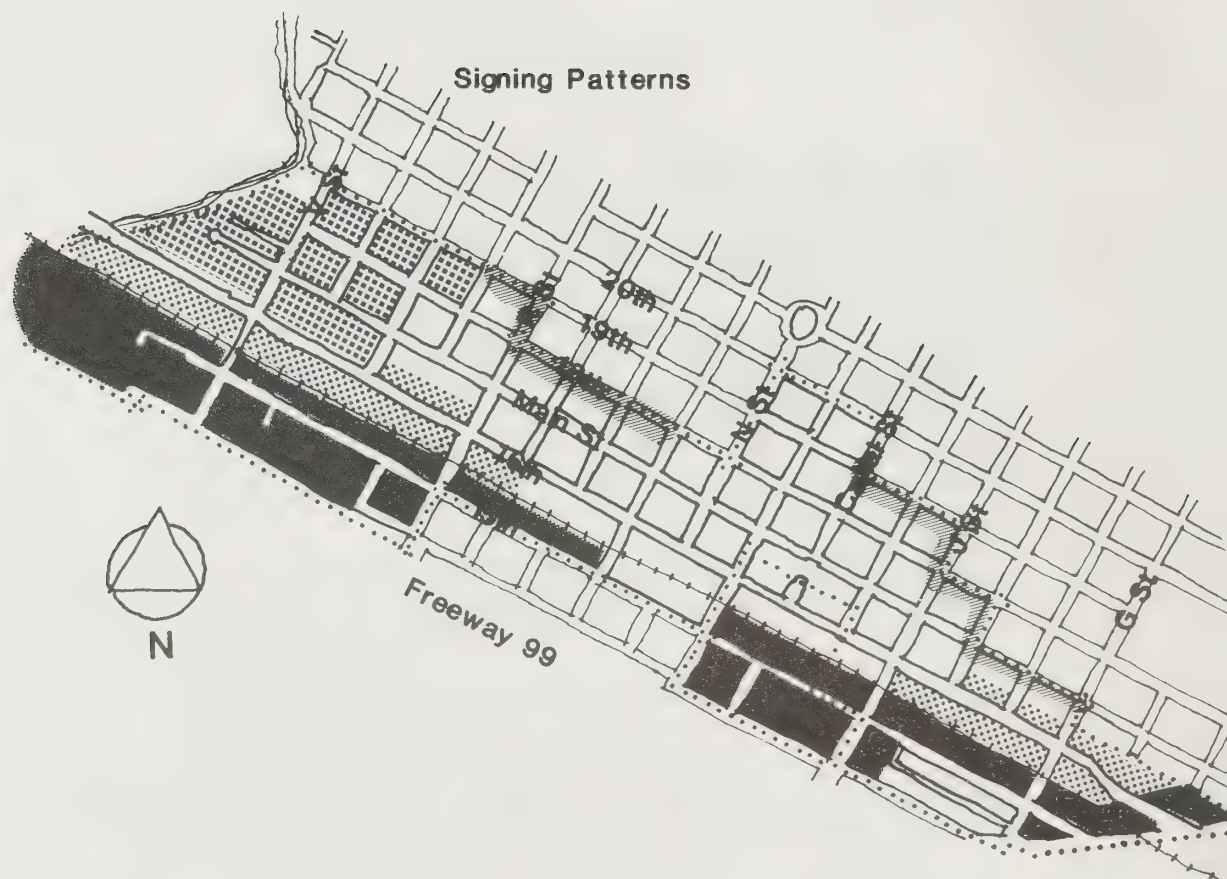
Automobile Sales Zone

Commercial Thoroughfare Zone

Freeway Zone

Residential Zone

Downtown Business Zone

AUTO SALES ZONE

Automobile sales usually require large lots and minimal buildings. To encourage auto sales in the Auto Sales Zone, restrictions on freestanding and projecting signs are less stringent and the sign areas are computed on lot frontage rather than building frontage.

COMMERCIAL THOROUGHFARE ZONE

The activities which occur along certain areas of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks/16th Street area require projecting or freestanding signs. While neither sign type is encouraged, they have been approved in these areas.

FREEWAY ZONE

Large signs (500-square-foot area/35-foot height maximums) are allowed within the freeway zone. One such sign is permitted for multiple occupancy sites. These signs are to be oriented to the freeway traffic for freeway services. All "local traffic" signs must comply to the guidelines.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

These areas are the edge between the downtown core and residential areas. To preserve the nature of these fragile zones, only monument, pedestrian and plaque-type signs are encouraged.

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ZONE

Freestanding, freeway and projecting signs are not approved in this area.

Signing NOT Permitted

A. Signs emitting foreign materials (smoke, sounds, etc.) shall not be permitted. Signs with flashing or pulsating illumination shall require special documentation.

B. Signs may not be affixed to, laid upon, painted on nor attached in any manner to the roof of any structure or building.

C. Neither freestanding nor building mounted billboards shall be permitted in the non-industrial zones of the Project Area.

SIGNING TIPS

A. Human Factors - Each viewer's perception of and response to signs is conditioned by certain physical and psychological factors.

Physical Factors

Field of Vision - Studies indicate that the normal cone of vison is 60 degrees. This can be enlarged by turning or tilting the head, but viewers resist this. They tend to hold the head stationary. Consistency in the height of signs reduces the viewer's need to look many places for information.

Reading Rate - Factors like age and education influence reading rates which vary from 125 w.p.m. to 600 w.p.m. The average rate is 250 w.p.m. Most signs are only seen for a few seconds, and should include a maximum of six short items.

Legibility/Letter Heights - Under laboratory conditions, a person standing still can read 1-inch-high letters from 50 feet head-on. Naturally, actual conditions vary and so must letter heights. If a viewer is moving, letter height and spacing should be enlarged in the direction of the movement. Greater viewing distances require greater heights. Eight-inch letters are legible for most downtown auto traffic conditions. Foreshortening is the effect caused by not viewing a sign head-on. Letters should be lengthened in the direction they are foreshortened so they will appear well-formed.

Eye Level - The average height of a viewer's eye is 5'6" above ground when standing, 4'3" when sitting, and 4'6" while driving.

Psychological Factors

Figure/Ground Relationship - The perception of shapes against a background affects recognition. Shapes are formed against background by edges. Anything which clarifies these edges makes the shape more apparent. Figure/ground concepts are also affected by "negative space." Words can often be recognized by overall shape just as individual letters are recognized by shape. If letter spacing is inappropriate, the recognition of the word is as affected as the recognition of a letter which is misshapen. An uncluttered background is necessary to promote prompt recognition of copy. A clear wall acts as a background and emphasizes the copy more than a costly cabinet which can clutter the wall. Shadows, being dark, tend to camouflage dark letters on a light background. Light letters on a dark background are less affected by shadows.

Implication of Color - Individuals' ability to distinguish and recall colors varies. Normal viewers can quickly recognize six colors: red, yellow, blue, green, orange and brown. Colors can be a coding device for quick recognition of a logo. Colors elicit psychological responses.

The following may be helpful in selecting colors.

1. <u>Red</u>. Red is an exciting, active color. It is used to suggest bold-ness, quickness, and efficiency. Its warmth is appetite-inspiring. Be-cause of its association with blood and berries, red is often used in restaurant color schemes. Fast-food chains used red to connote warmth, fresh food (meat) and action.

2. <u>Yellow</u>. Another color which is frequently used by fast-food res-taurants which want to create a welcoming atmosphere is yellow. As a warm color, yellow is inviting. Yellow suggests light and activity, especially in redder shades and tints.

3. <u>Blue</u>. Its coolness tends to connote dignity, serenity, wisdom, and quiet. While its use might not be appropriate for a business which wishes to emphasize its speed and efficiency, it might be used by a business which wants to suggest that it has a leisurely pace and a general atmosphere of cultivation and calm. It also tends to suggest stability and is a color used often by banks and large corporations.

4. <u>Green</u>. Living things and, there-fore, freshess, youth, and purity are often associated with green. It is the predominate color of nature (and, therefore, should be used judiciously in a rural setting, so

that it does not fade into the sur-
roundings). It is powerful in sug-
gesting naturalness and vitality and
yet it connotes peacefulness.

5. Brown. Brown is the color of the
earth and tends to connote natural-
ness and strength. Businesses
which want to indicate their strength
and mainstream value system often
use brown and wood hues in their
signs. Brown often connotes ranch-
ing and farming interests. Some
fast-food franchises have used brown
on their signs to suggest the ranch
association of their foods. Brown is
basically neutral due to its associa-
tion with earth and wood. It is not
a color to catch your eye and sug-
gest action.

6. Purple. This color has come to be
associated with royalty, pomp, and
luxuriousness. Its visibility factor
is low making it unsuitable for
freeway signs but it is often used
for personal service businesses such
as beauty salons.

7. White. In Western society, white
has been the color of innocence. On
a sign, it can be used to suggest
cleanliness and purity.

8. Black. Black can be used effec-
tively in signage to create an im-
pression of low-keyed crispness and
sedateness. Sophistication also is
suggested, if large areas are used.

Applications of colors which are effective as art or on objects may be troublesome in signing. When two complementary colors of equal chroma are used together, a tension results. This tension should be avoided or handled with discretion. Some colors are more conspicuous than others. The order of conspicuity is as follows:

> yellow
> orange and white
> red
> blue
> green
> black

The best color combination in order of legibility from a distance are:

> black on yellow
> black on white
> yellow on black
> white on blue
> yellow on blue
> green on white
> blue on yellow
> white on green
> white on brown
> brown on yellow

B.   Signing Factors

Lighting - As ambient light levels decrease, contrast between background and copy should increase. Colored light can obscure a sign's copy. Illuminated lights are most effective when ambient light is low. Too high a level of internal lighting can cause a "halo-effect" which blurs the perceived object.

Sight Lines - Placing all signs at eye level is an over-simplified approach. Consider the following:

Is the sign clear of obstructions?

Is the sign as close to head-on as possible?

If the sign is outside the normal field of vision, is there anything to draw the eye to the sign?

Are there distractions behind the sign?

Will growing landscaping eventually cover the sign?

Sign Backgrounds - If a sign is placed in the foreground of a visually cluttered scene, it will be lost. An artificial background should be used to isolate the message. Rough textures or patterned backgrounds may obscure the message. A plain panel or wall provides an excellent backdrop for letter forms.

Copy Wording - Some phrases can be ambiguous or misleading. Words should be clear in meaning to all viewers. Rapid recognition requires that the shortest word be selected over a longer word of the same meaning. Wording should express an idea in positive terms. Your sign is usually your first salesperson. Copy which appropriately includes both capitals and lower case letters is more easily read than copy which is all capitals. A word may be written in all capitals for emphasis over read-ability. Enlarging a "keyword" will help the mes-sage read farther away.

C. Design - Good sign design is a dichotomy. Aesthetics call for sensitivity to the environment and function requires being noticed. Aesthetics and function need not be opposing determinants.

Architecturally Integrated Signing - Appropriate signing is a noticeable feature which is an integral part of its environment. A sign may relate to its environment through geometry, material, color, scale and detail.

Geometry - Signs can relate to a building by being located within an architectural feature or as a mimic of a feature. Signs may be decorative, and should be placed effectively. Entries should be emphasized with visual interest.

Material - A repetition of some finish materials can unite a sign with its environment. It is helpful to use existing building surfaces for sign backgrounds.

Color - Sign copy can be in a color which contrasts to most other colors in its environment. It will seem more integrated with its surroundings if this color can be re-used sparingly as a trim element. Often trim lines can be used to draw the eye to the sign if it is necessary to cause a head movement.

Scale - Sign size should not overwhelm its environment. Some signs scaled to the freeway which are painted on a building wall fall into this class. Fortunately, in most downtown areas, the scale is homogenous. Auto sales areas and those areas adjacent to the freeway are most likely to have scalar conflicts.

Detail - Sign cabinets and copy should relate to the building in style. For example, the Bold Clarendon letter style goes well with turn of the century commercial buildings. Try to avoid thin line letter styles - they are hard to read. Logo's may relate to an architectural style also. Some products or logo's are very contemporary and do not relate to a particular historical building style. If this occurs, try to utilize the two styles in obvious, clear opposition. Treat the building as structure for the housing of more contemporary fixtures and furnishings; in this case, the signing relates to the function as "filling" of the building rather than the "carcass." The two styles may be related in some way, but the relationship should be minimal. The distinction should be clear.

Practical Considerations - Good design should not neglect non-aesthetic issues.

Illumination - When ambient lighting is weak, illumination is required. Illumination should be economical and easily maintained. In a mixed use area, like downtown, lighting should be designed to minimize disturbance to neighbors.

Vandal Resistance - Signs should be designed to thwart most attempts at vandalism, especially lower signs.

Easy Maintenance - Consider time and cost of maintenance in sign design.

Weathering - Selecting the proper materials and paints for a specific situation is important. Electrical signs should have weather-tight cabinets and conduit where necessary.

<u>Flexibility</u> - It is sometimes necessary to change signs. Engraving signage into the stones of a building would be foolish for a tenant renting on a month-to-month basis. Design flexibility into signs where necessary.

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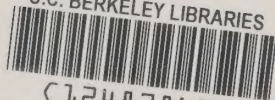
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NOTES

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